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The Center for Corporate Community Relations at Boston College is a national educational and research organization committed to helping corporations maintain a positive presence in communities while improving the quality of community life. The Center conducts institutes for managers and community relations professionals; collects, analyzes and disseminates information on community relations activities; promotes opportunities for the cooperation of business and community leaders; publishes a newsletter on community relations issues; and provides consultation to corporations interested in developing or improving their programs. Many of these services are available at a reducted cost with a Center corporate membership. To order additional copies of this report or for more information, contact The Center for Corporate Community Relations, Boston College, McGuinn Hall, Chestnut Hill, MA 02167, (617) 552-4545.

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COMMUNITY RELATIONS 1987:
A Profile of the Profession

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**A research report from
The Center for
Corporate Community Relations**

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Foreword

The growth of corporate community relations programs in business and industry over the past years has been nothing less than remarkable. A few years ago the community relations function - if it existed at all - was restricted to organizing the company United Way drive and serving as the representative on community boards and committees. In some companies that may still be the way the community relations function is defined. But in most, it is changing and expanding.

This report is directed towards better understanding the way in which the community relations function is changing. It is the result of a national survey of community relations managers - the first of its kind. Carried out under the direction of Jerry Boren, Assistant Director for Research at The Center, the study's purpose is to document the shape of community relations within the American corporation. The results are both interesting and informative.

This survey, which will be repeated annually, is one more way The Center carries out its mission of service to corporations and communities.

I wish to thank all the people who took the time to respond to this survey. Thanks too, to Susan Thomas and Elaine Gottlieb for their assistance in producing this report.

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Director

Introduction

This report is the result of a national survey of community relations managers initiated by The Center for Corporate Community Relations at Boston College. The purpose of the study, which will be repeated on an annual basis, is to document the changing shape of this new and important function within the American corporation.

In recent years the American corporation has moved to formalize community relations as a staff function distinct from public relations and public affairs, and to develop a more strategic focus for its activities. Outside the corporation these developments have been accompanied by the emergence of specialized training programs; an effort to define the boundaries of the field and the necessary qualifications of personnel; and the growth of a self-conscious network of community relations practitioners which is being nurtured by the distribution of specialized newsletters and the holding of professional meetings and conferences.

Taken together these developments suggest that the community relations field is undergoing some degree of professionalization. However, there is also evidence of several countertrends to which community relations may be vulnerable. Thus, some observers fear that the increase in corporate mergers and acquisitions and the cutbacks in personnel could have a severe impact on the growth of this emerging field.

This survey was conducted to answer these and other questions. It was designed to collect information on the salary structure, career paths, professional development and background characteristics of community relations practitioners. It will also provide insights into budget outlook, staffing plans and the organizational status of community relations within the corporation. This report presents the findings of the first annual survey.

Study Highlights

1. Community relations is clearly a part-time profession. Respondents devote an average of 53% of their time to CR while only 9% reported full-time responsibilities.

2. The vast majority of respondents did not begin their professional careers in the CR field. Most commonly, they moved into the field from administrative staff positions within the corporation or from management positions in public relations, communications or public affairs.

3. Once in the CR field, inter-company mobility is limited. Seventy percent of those surveyed have spent their entire CR career with the same company.

4. Members of this national sample were not pessimistic about prospects for staff and budget decreases in 1987. Only 8% expected a decrease in staff and 12% in budget.

5. In several key industries - in particular, telephone companies, gas and electric utilities and much of the manufacturing sector - decentralization of the CR function is well underway. Banks are beginning to move in this direction as well.

6. Thirty-seven percent of CR managers surveyed have earned a graduate or professional degree.

7. Overall, the field of community relations attracts women and men in roughly equal numbers. However, women are under-represented at the director level and over-represented at the lower levels of management.

8. The median income range for female CR managers is $40,000-50,000 while for males it is $50,000-60,000. Women who occupy each of the three senior management positions earn less than their male counterparts and this holds true regardless of seniority in position.

Findings

Educational Background

People who handle community relations responsibilities in the corporation come primarily from the social sciences, the arts and humanities, and business. Thirty-five percent have earned at least one degree in the social sciences, 26% in the arts or humanities, and 23% in business.

The vast majority (98%) of community relations practitioners have earned at least a bachelor's degree. For 61% of the sample this was the highest degree, while 37% have earned a graduate or professional degree - usually a master's (33%). Only 7% of the respondents had MBA's.

Work History and Career Paths

A majority of the study respondents (54%) have worked in the field of community relations for more than five years. Only 7% reported having worked in the field for less than one year; the median stay was six years.

A majority (56%) have been in their current position for three years or less with a median stay of 2.8 years. However, many have moved into their present position from elsewhere in the company. Sixty-six percent have been with their current employer for more than five years with a median stay of slightly more than seven years.

Most community relations managers do not begin their professional careers in the CR field. Members of the study sample began working in the CR field at an average age of 34 and approximately half did not assume CR responsibilities when they began working with their present company. Overall, those without CR responsibilities when they joined the firm worked a median of 7.5 years before assuming such duties. Only 13% were working in CR within the first two years, while a much larger group (37%) did not move into CR until they had been with the company for at least ten years. Less than 1% report having entered a CR position directly from college.

While the average entrance age is 34, for one-third of the sample the assumption of CR responsibilities began during their twenties. For another 40% it began in their thirties. And, for an additional 20% it began in their forties. Finally, CR is a late career move (50 years or older) for only 6%.

What about mobility from one company to another? At this point in the evolution of the CR field, the most common pattern is for a person to have spent their entire CR career working within a single company - 70% have done so. Only 30% of the respondents began working in the CR field prior to joining their present company. In fact, 39% had not worked in CR prior to their current position in the firm.

A second type of mobility is the movement from one speciality to another. By comparing current titles of respondents with their previous titles, it is possible to identify some of the paths that people travel into the CR field. For example, only 20% of the respondents had a CR title prior to their current position; the remaining 80% held previous positions with non-CR titles. An examination of these titles reveals this group entered the CR field from a wide variety of backgrounds. The largest group (23%) had held professional staff positions such as

business manager, financial officer, assistant to the President, or other administrative staff positions. The next most common paths were from public relations (19%), communications (12%), public affairs (11%) and personnel (8%). A smaller percentage of respondents (5%) moved into CR from support staff positions such as administrative assistant or secretary, while only 2% had occupied a line manager's position.

Job Responsibilities

These findings paint a distinct picture of community relations as a part-time profession. Survey respondents devote an average of 53% of their time to CR responsibilities (including contributions) with only 9% devoting full-time. The remaining 91% wear at least one other hat. Most frequently their other responsibilities include public relations (68%), public affairs or government relations (55%), or employee relations (55%).

Most CR practitioners have some responsibility for the company's foundation or charitable contributions program. Eighty-seven percent of the sample said that an average of 25% of their time goes to this function.

The part-time nature of community relations is further emphasized by the fact that only 16% of the sample are located in a separate CR department while over half (56%) are located in public (or governmental) affairs, public relations or communications.

Changes in Departmental Budgets and Staff

There has been a good deal of speculation and anecdotal evidence concerning the impact of mergers, acquisitions and corporate downsizing on the community relations function. The data collected here suggest that the fears may be worse than the reality. During 1986, only 15% of the study respondents worked in departments where there were decreases in CR staff and 18% reported decreases in budget. On the other hand, 29% worked in departments where there were staff increases and 55% reported budget increases in 1986.

The overall expectations for 1987 of the sample are that departmental growth in community relations staff and budget will not be as common, but the picture is still less pessimistic than might be expected. While only 18% expect staff increases, an even smaller number (8%) expect a decrease, and the vast majority (74%) expect no change at all. Their budget outlook is even more optimistic. Forty-five percent expect the budget to increase in their department while only 12% think it will decrease, and 43% predict no change.

The picture differs somewhat from industry to industry. Overall, CR managers who work in health and other non-financial services, and in gas and electric utilities are more likely to be optimistic about budget increases in 1987. Respondents most likely to express optimism about staff increases work in the health services, chemical or pharmaceutical firms, and telephone companies.

Decentralization of the CR Function

A significant development in recent years has been the shift of community relations responsibility to line managers in plants, branch offices and service facilities. The degree of decentralization can vary a great deal, however. In some cases the corporate office may issue comprehensive policy and procedural guidelines and perform a close supervisory role, while in others corporate staff assume more of a consultant or resource center role to the field staff.

The data from this study indicate that 59% of the respondents work in departments where the CR function has been decentralized to "some degree" or to "a significant degree". An additional 8% say that such a move is "in the planning stages". A significant minority, exactly one-third, say that no part of the CR function has been decentralized and that there are no plans to do so.

The function is much more likely to be decentralized in some industries than others. Respondents who work for public utilities, banks and manufacturing firms are much more likely to report decentralized operations than are those who work in insurance, health and other services, or retail and wholesale companies. As might be expected, company size is also related to decentralization. The larger a company the more likely a respondent was to report a decentralized approach to community relations.

Professional Development

Participation in professional meetings and continuing education programs are an important indicator of the professional status of a field. The vast majority of the study sample reported attendance at some type of professional development program during the past 12 months. Eighty percent said that they had attended one or more institutes, seminars, meetings or conferences related to their work as community relations professionals.

What types or organizations sponsor these programs? Most respondents (69%) attended at least one program sponsored by a business, trade or professional group, while 32% reported attending an event sponsored by a charitable or community service organization and 24% mentioned an academic institution. Ten percent listed their own company or another major corporation; only 4% identified private consulting or public relations firms as sponsors.

Specific organizations mentioned most frequently as sponsors included The Center for Corporate Community Relations, Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), regional grantmakers, Public Affairs Council, The Conference Board, Volunteer, and the Council on Foundations.

Respondents were also asked to list the names of any professional associations to which they belong. Sixty-eight percent mentioned at least one organization and

reported an average of 2.4 memberships each. The organization identified most frequently was the PRSA - mentioned by one-third of those who listed a membership. Fifteen percent are members of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) while 14% of the women who listed memberships are members of Women in Philanthropy.

Demographic Characteristics, Income and Status

What can be learned about the demographic makeup of the community relations field from this sample? The data suggest that community relations is an area within the corporation where management positions are open to women and minorities. Overall, men and women are represented fairly equally in the sample; 51% of the respondents are females, 49% males. Members of minority groups make up 10% of the sample. These figures are higher than might be expected given the representation of college educated women and minorities in the national workforce. The average age of respondents is 42 with only 9% being below the age of 30.

There appear to be five distinct levels of management responsibility in the community relations field as defined by a combination of title and income. The levels are vice president, director, manager, representative/ officer/administrator/supervisor, and coordinator. Table I shows the distribution of respondents by management position and Table II shows the relationship between position and income.

Table I

Management Position of Respondents

Position	Male (%)	Female (%)	All (%)
Vice President [1]	10	10	10
Director [2]	39	24	31
Manager	38	41	40
Representative [3]	10	16	13
Coordinator	3	9	6
TOTAL %	100	100	100

1 Includes Assistant and Second Vice Presidents
2 Includes Executive Directors
3 Includes Officers, Administrators, Specialists, Counselors, Supervisors, Analysts and Consultants

Table II

Median Income by Management Position

Position	Median Income
Vice President	$50,000-60,000
Director	$50,000-60,000
Manager	$40,000-50,000
Representative	$30,000-40,000
Coordinator	$20,000-30,000

The median income range for the sample as a whole is $40,000-49,999. However, the findings also show that women earn less than men and are less well represented at the director level and over-represented at the lower levels of CR management. The median income range for female respondents was $40,000-50,000, while the median for males was $50,000-60,000. Some, but not all, of this differential in income reflects the greater representation of men in the higher management positions, since about half of the male respondents are either directors or vice presidents, while this is true of only 34% of the female respondents. However, the findings also reveal a distinct pattern of lower salaries for women in the three highest managerial positions - vice president, director and manager. This income differential persists even when seniority in one's current position is taken into consideration. Table III shows the relationship between gender, income and management position.

Table III

Median Income, Management Position and Gender

Position and Gender	Median Income
Vice President	
Male	$80,000-90,000
Female	$40,000-50,000
Director	
Male	$60,000-70,000
Female	$50,000-60,000
Manager	
Male	$50,000-60,000
Female	$40,000-50,000
Representative	
Male	$30,000-40,000
Female	$30,000-40,000
Coordinator	
Male	$20,000-30,000
Female	$30,000-40,000

How The Study Was Conducted

A questionaire was mailed to a national sample of 1,596 respondents in March of 1987. A follow-up postcard was sent approximately one month after the initial mailing. A total of 426 questionaires were returned for a 27% response rate.

A check of the distribution of responses by region shows that the response rate varied from 20% to 33% among the nine federal census regions - a reasonably good distribution for a national sample.

The sample consisted of all persons on The Center's mailing list whose title suggests that they might have some responsibility for community relations in their organization. The mailing list has been developed over a period of four years based on The Center's extensive work in the field. It is believed to contain the most representative sample of community relations practitioners available.